



**UP ON THE SUN**  
MUSIC AND CULTURE



**Concert Review: Alice Cooper's Christmas Pudding**



**10 Things Under \$10: Santarchy, Joe Strummer, and More**



**9-Piece Orchestral Punk Ensemble Coming To Rogue Bar**

**Get the tools and guidance you need to buy your first home.**

Our Home Loan Guide will show you how.

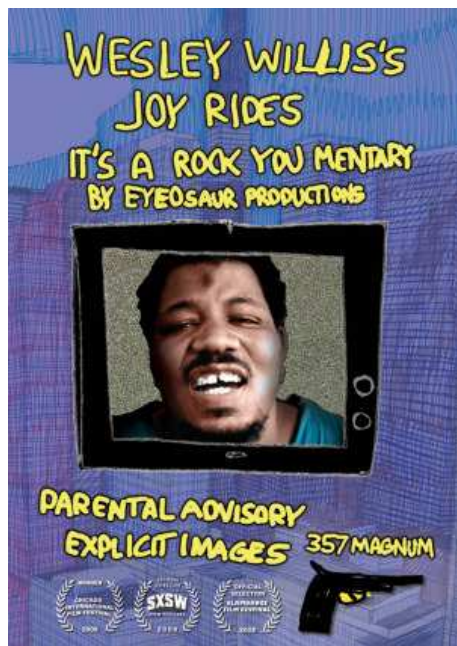
**Bank of America Home Loans** [Start here](#)

BANK OF AMERICA, N.A. EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

## Wesley Willis' s Joy Rides: Portrait of a Schizophrenic Chicago City Artist and "Rock Star"

By Niki D'Andrea in [DVD Review](#)

Mon., Dec. 21 2009 @ 8:00AM



Wesley Willis sits at a computer and adjusts his ever-present headphones, pushes them up against his ears, turns up the volume of the music. He's frustrated because he still can't hear his beloved rock 'n' roll over all the shouts of "Bum!" and "You're a stupid asshole!" He begins to cuss, and smack himself in the side of the head. The guy at the computer next to him glances over, wide-eyed behind his spectacles. "I'm sorry," Willis tells him. "I'm hearing voices."

This is one of the scenes from *Wesley Willis's Joy Rides*, a documentary about the schizophrenic street artist from Chicago turned

self-proclaimed "rock star." First impressions of Willis weren't always so unnerving for everybody. Although his massive stature and peculiar facial scars made him look intimidating, Willis was "really just a big teddy bear," as one of his friends describes him in *Joy Rides*.

Willis' music wasn't revolutionary, or even very good. He and his band, The Wesley Willis Fiasco, had a record deal with Alternative Tentacles Records, the label owned by former Dead Kennedys singer and all-around punk icon Jello Biafra. But most people, including some of his fans, viewed Willis' music as a novelty or joke: Here was this huge black guy sporting a big dreadlock afro and stained sweatpants, holding up a lyric sheet or sitting at a Technics keyboard looping the same canned beat, barking out eclectic lyrics like "You bring me damaging disharmony in my life by cussing at me for no reason at all" and "Suck a

Blogs Only

[Advanced Archive Search >>](#)

- Weekly
- Music
- Promotions
- Dining
- Events

Subscribe

### Most

- [Recent](#)
- [Commented](#)
- [Viewed](#)

[Concert Review: Alice Cooper's Christmas Pudding](#)

Wesley Willis' s Joy Rides: Portrait of a Schizophrenic Chicago City Artist and "Rock Star"

[Lady Gay Gay Takes Over Vegas](#)

[Curtains: Happy Birthday, Katie Valentine at Chyro Arts](#)

[DJ Dossier: Soloman](#)

[More Recent Entries...](#)

### Slideshows



[Winter Horrorland Fashion Show In Photos](#)



buildings, buses, and trains; to London, where he performs his brand of "rock and roll" for an enthusiastic club; to California, where Biafra talks about Willis' prolific music (he self-released more than 45 "albums" before Biafra signed him); and finally, back to Illinois, where he succumbed to leukemia at the age of 40.

In addition to the footage of Willis talking to the camera, there are also interviews with his family, friends, and art patrons. It's interesting to hear architecture teachers and art buyers talk about Willis' drawings, marveling at the perfect lines and hard angles, the double vanishing points, and his attention to detail.

It's even more interesting to watch him interact with the public. Willis was a friendly person, and talked to pretty much everybody he saw. He was known for gently head-butting people, and had a callous on his forehead from doing it. He would proudly talk about his music, ask people to buy CDs or artwork, ask them questions about themselves. Anybody who gave him a chance stuck around to talk.

What's so great about *Wesley Willis's Joy Rides* is it really provides a portrait of Willis not only as an artist, but a person, and it does so without histrionics or mushy pontificating -- a pitfall of some documentaries about the deceased.

Willis died from leukemia in 2003, before this film was finished, yet he's so brilliantly alive here, even after his friends talk about their last moments with him and the end credits start to roll.

Tags: [chicago film festival](#), [documentary](#), [geeks](#), [jello biafra](#), [mvd visual](#), [schizophrenia](#), [slamdance film festival](#), [sxsw international film festival](#), [wesley willis](#), [wesley willis's joyrides](#)

 [Post a Comment](#)



Name:

Email:

URL:

Remember personal info?

Comments (you may use HTML tags for style):

Comments may not show up immediately after submission. Please wait a minute after posting a comment for it to appear.

All reader comments are subject to our [Terms of Use](#). By clicking "Post," you acknowledge that you have reviewed and agree to these Terms.

### Club Candid: Gosh Damn! at Club Vibe



Whisper Lounge in Photos

[More Slideshows >>](#)

### Twitter Updates

Bringing back the bounty: I'll pay any NFL player \$20 for crippling Denver LB Andra Davis before the season is over. [about 15 hours ago](#)

Putting the finishing touches on my best of 2009 and best of the naughties lists... [about 18 hours ago](#)

@realjoe happy birthday from across the floor at Sergio Mendoza! [3 days ago](#)

Weezer's Phoenix show canceled on "Doctor's Orders:" <http://bit.ly/6QzlZK> [3 days ago](#)

@azdjmel0 You're a fool! Amerikkka is far superior, though I prefer Predator to either... [3 days ago](#)

[Follow Us >>](#)

### Reader's Picks

[BARS](#)  
[RESTAURANTS](#)   [MEMBERS](#)

### Now Click This

- [Phoenix Art and Soul](#)
- [Follow New Times Events on Twitter](#)
- [Follow New Times Coverage on Twitter](#)
- [Digital Jukebox](#)
- [New Times Street Team](#)
- [Add New Times on Myspace](#)
- [Become a New Times fan on Facebook](#)

### Free Classifieds Phoenix, AZ

- [buy, sell, trade \(11,482\)](#)
- [musician \(1,505\)](#)
- [rentals \(7,271\)](#)
- [jobs \(1,462\)](#)
- [adult entertainment \(12,070\)](#)

### PERSONAL OF THE DAY



**golstein**

Best (or worst) lie I've ever told: "I do not lie. I just change the subject."

[More Personals >>](#)

### Top Recommendations

A short list of Phoenix's most popular hot spots.



**Slices**  
Tempe, AZ



**Gordon Biersch**  
Tempe, AZ



**Dos Gringos**  
Scottsdale, AZ



**Casey Moore's Oyster House**  
Tempe, AZ



**Alice Cooper's tower Kitchen**  
Phoenix, AZ



**Chelsea's Kitchen**  
Phoenix, AZ

user content provided by:  
[LikeMe.net](#) & [New Times](#)

**Subscribe to RSS**

**Receive e-mail updates**

Subscribe

### Monthly Archives

### Categories

[Arizona Music Club](#)

[ASU Web Devil Arts & Entertainment](#)

[AZ Party Girlz](#)

[Cenpho.tv](#)

[The Congregation of Taste-Making Aficionados](#)

[The Dish With Jess Harter](#)

[Electric Mustache](#)

[Gilgongo Records](#)

[The Good Shows](#)

[Hoodlums Music](#)

[Idolator](#)

[Local First Arizona](#)

[Phoenix Blues Society](#)

<a href="#">Phoenix Local Music</a>
<a href="#">Psyko Steve</a>
<a href="#">Radio Phoenix</a>
<a href="#">The Shizz</a>
<a href="#">Silver Platter</a>
<a href="#">So Much Silence</a>
<a href="#">The Soop</a>
<a href="#">Spray Blog</a>
<a href="#">Stateside Presents</a>
<a href="#">Tucson Scene</a>
<a href="#">Waved Rumor</a>
<b>Village Voice Media</b>
<a href="#">All Shook Down (San Francisco)</a>
<a href="#">A to Z (St. Louis)</a>
<a href="#">Backbeat Online (Denver)</a>
<a href="#">Crossfade (Miami/South Florida)</a>
<a href="#">DC9 at Night (Dallas)</a>
<a href="#">Gimme Noise (Minneapolis)</a>
<a href="#">Heard Mentality (OC Weekly)</a>
<a href="#">Nashville Cream (Nashville)</a>
<a href="#">Play (Los Angeles)</a>
<a href="#">Rocks Off (Houston)</a>
<a href="#">Sound of the City (NYC)</a>
<a href="#">Wayward Blog (Kansas City)</a>